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SUBJECT: Endorsement of Benin's Ten-Year Education Sector Development Plan.

¶1. SUMMARY: Under USAID leadership, 12 donors have completed their endorsement of Benin's Ten-Year Education Sector Development Plan (TESDP). USAID/Benin sent the donor assessment of the plan and letter of endorsement to the World Bank's Fast Track Secretariat on January 31, 2007. With this endorsement, Benin should be admitted to the Education For All - Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a partnership between developing and donor countries to help developing countries to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The FTI partnership is supported by a Steering Committee and a Secretariat managed by the World Bank. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The FTI was created in 2002 to increase education funding available for low-income countries that demonstrate a serious commitment to achieving universal primary education. The increased assistance will result from the development of well-thought-out ten year education plans that are endorsed by the local donor community. By taking advantage of this initiative, Benin is pursuing a path for sustainable development of the education sector and accelerated movement toward universal primary education.

¶3. Benin's TESP addresses the policy, capacity and financial issues of Benin's education sector. The plan focuses on strengthening the management of the sector; improving the quality of and access to educational services; improving the quality of the sector's human resources; reducing the continuing gap in enrollment rates between boys and girls; and increasing the role of local communities as well as that of the private sector in education. The plan also sets out financial requirements for the next ten years. Under the primary education component, Benin expects to reach universal primary education by 2015, with a targeted achievement rate (completion of grade 5) of 100% by 2014.

¶4. In accordance with FTI guidelines, education donors in Benin conducted a technical assessment before endorsing the plan. The purpose of the assessment and letter of endorsement were: (a) to establish evidence that a positive policy environment exists for the education sector and that constraints to policy implementation are being addressed; (b) to guide the donors in coordinating their support to the sector; and (c) to provide donor endorsement that the country's sector plan is credible and sustainable.

¶5. The donor assessment and endorsement concludes a review process that began in June 2005, and which was led by USAID -- Benin's main donor in the primary education sector for the past 15 years. USAID has also been the head of the local donor coordination group on education for the past three years. Overall, the donors found that the Benin plan meets the FTI guidelines.

¶6. Donor endorsement of the TESP and the inclusion of Benin in the Fast-Track Initiative are important achievements for the education

sector here. These are critical steps toward obtaining additional resources to address the education quality and access problems that have confronted Benin's education system since the beginning of primary education reform in 1991. With FTI eligibility, Benin hopes to qualify for transitional short-term funding under the FTI Catalytic Fund when the Strategy Committee meets in March 2007.

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